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Melville's Wall Street: It Speaks for Itself

Matthew Guillen

1 Subtitled "A Story of Wall Street", Herman Melville's compact and—compared to its controversial immediate predecessor *Pierre or the Ambiguities*—"tidy" piece, "Bartleby the Scrivener" evokes an insular, and cartographically almost peninsular, portion of Manhattan Island shimmering in the newly emerging largesse which will soon typify New York as the grand commercial crossroads of the world.[1]

2 The tale involves the relationship between Bartleby and his employer, the attorney narrator, and unfolds within office spaces only explicitly defined by two windows facing exterior walls as well as by a wooden screen and a folding panel with panes of ground glass—the former separating Bartleby from the lawyer and the latter effectively separating the lawyer and Bartleby from Turkey, Nippers, and Ginger Nut, the other characters in the lawyer's employ.

3 Bartleby soon begins reducing his workload (much of which entails hand copying legal documents) by extending his "preferences" not to compare manuscript copies to other tasks, and eventually, not to copy or write at all—in short, he ceases work entirely. In the process, the lawyer comes to discover that Bartleby has also taken up residence in the office. Despite attempts to dislodge the scrivener or, at the very least, exact some form of labor from him, Bartleby resists, spending the workweek in idle contemplation while the rest of the firm tries going about its routine. The lawyer nevertheless attempts adapting to the circumstances. As rumors spread among clientele and colleagues, however, Bartleby's employer opts in favor of sounder business judgment and moves his practice elsewhere, thereby ridding himself of Bartleby while avoiding the moral dilemma of an outright eviction. The new office tenants discover Bartleby rooted in their midst and, less inclined to tolerate his presence, have the scrivener arrested and imprisoned in a lower-Manhattan penitentiary of the day known as the Tombs, where Bartleby refuses nourishment and eventually dies. Finally, in a "sequel" to the short story, the lawyer recounts "one little item of rumour" to the effect that prior to his arrival in New York, Bartleby had worked in the "dead-letter office" at Washington, D.C., charged with reading and then destroying undeliverable mail. The mail would have been undeliverable largely

due to the death of the addressee—the putative "melancholia" associated with such tasks offered as explanation for the scrivener's eventual behavior.

4 Apart from identity analyses of the recalcitrant scrivener who, three days after his job debut, begins stating his "preferences" not to perform certain, nor finally any, of his assigned tasks, the story's subtitle has raised certain premises of its own, many of which tend towards the esoteric. Bartleby is twice described as slipping into "dead-wall reveries" before one of the office windows.[2] And in conjunction with the four other references to "walls" apart from the Wall Street locale, many critics have teased out of the reading Melville's service to a generally symbolic convention, representing as such the figurative insularity of existence bound by the void girding birth and death.[3] Ronald Hoag, for example, refers to the story's "much-discussed wall imagery" which, "as elsewhere in Melville's fiction" symbolizes death and mystery:

> All of the lawyer's office windows open into cavities, and in the space between the white wall of a sky-light shaft and a brick wall "black by age," the lawyer makes his office and lives much of his life. These walls, however, suggest more than has been noted. Although the black wall, darkened by an "everlasting shade," clearly represents death by aging, the skylit wall, while similarly "deficient in what landscape painters call 'life,'" is nonetheless a mixed symbol that, in part, connotes birth, as in a delivery into the light.[4]

5 Hoag's felicitous use of "clearly" in referring to Melville's age-blackened wall is, meanwhile, indicative of the sort of pre-apocalyptic (or, in the words of Jenny Franchot: "post-Scriptural") cast given by a number of critics to virtually anything issuing from the Melville canon.[5] "Life, then," Hoag continues:

> goes on in the brief space between the shaft of the birth canal and the shaft of the grave. Within this intramural Vanity Fair the lawyer exists in a precarious interregnum in the sovereignty of annihilation [...] the lawyer's office is a flimsy fortress against the recognition of mortality. Despite its superficial vitality, it is fundamentally imbued with death.[6]

6 The merit of this and similar observations notwithstanding, it will be suggested that the subtitle is of paramount importance, but it is rather the moral insularity of a financial community anent the social ills accompanying New York's diverse and sudden population growth during the first half of the nineteenth century—the first strains of urban blight and personal alienation—which lies at the center of Melville's tale.

7 A lawyer whose sense of place and time, not insignificantly, corresponds perfectly to events that occurred in New York prior to the story's publication, narrates "Bartleby", yet he preens on the "petty triumphs of the age" (his "enviable" former association with millionaire John Jacob Astor), which Mumford credits Melville for introducing a "tragic sense of life" this era lacked.[7] The "tragic sense of life" of Melville's New York entailed acknowledgment, which the story's narrator refuses, of the cruel juxtaposition of wealth with a poverty of epic proportion, the principle victims of which, in reality, were the recently arrived Irish. One poignant element of their displacement from a disease and famine wracked homeland was the failure of mail to reach its destination due to the death of the intended recipient, and this detail is underscored in a newspaper account deemed the source to Melville's "dead letter" epilogue to the short story, a source (and the implications of which) most readers of the day, it will be argued, would have immediately recognized. Bartleby thus becomes an "everyman" representing the shadowy substance behind the elegant façade of New York's financial prowess.

1. Melville's "dark beetling secrecies of mortar and stone"

8 In the first half of the nineteenth century, the unpleasant byproducts of Hamiltonian industrial incentive—government policies virtually eliminating all forms of corporate liability for conditions detrimental to their workforce—radiated throughout the Northeast: sweatshops, overcrowding, illiteracy, filth, and disease ravaged a growing mass of industrial workers, their conditions aggravated by the unemployment financial panics in 1837 and 1857 spurred.

9 Melville was born in New York City on August 1st, 1819, into the Gansevoort family—replete, in this epoch, with lawyers of every stripe, many of whom had direct connections with government—and grew up in what is today's Chinatown. At the age of five, after his father's death and a decline in family finances, the Melvilles moved north to Bleecker Street in present-day Greenwich Village. Brother Gansevoort Melville opened a haberdashery on Market Street and when Herman was fifteen, Gansevoort got a job as clerk in the New York State Bank—originally founded by Alexander Hamilton, and of which Herman's uncle Peter Gansevoort was one of the trustees. Brother Allan became a lawyer and practiced from an office building at 14 Wall Street. Although Melville aspired to the country life—living for several years near Pittsfield, Massachusetts—he invariably returned to New York City to garner income, whether writing or working at the Customs House in a lower Manhattan become increasingly poverty-ridden and dangerous.

10 By the time Melville was ten, an area known as Five Points, named for the intersection of **Park, Worth, and Baxter** streets, northeast of City Hall, had become famous for its squalid, overcrowded dwellings, raucous, licentious street life, polyglot population and 12,000 impoverished blacks, remaining notorious as a center of vice and debauchery well into the twentieth century. Describing a visit in 1842, Charles Dickens wrote:

> [T]he Five Points [...]This is the place: these narrow ways diverging to the right and left, and reeking everywhere with dirt and filth [...]The coarse and bloated faces at the doors have counterparts at home and all the wide world over. Debauchery has made the very houses prematurely old. See how the rotten beams are tumbling down, and how the patched and broken windows seem to scowl dimly, like eyes that have been hurt in drunken frays.[8]

11 Northeast of the intersection, Park spilled into a street named Bowery—eventually lending to the New York theme the image of "Bowery bum"—dereliction synonymous with this neighborhood even today. Originally intended as a middle-class district, the area had been hastily built on poorly laid landfill near the East River. As the houses started to sag, most of the original residents fled, abandoning the area to those who could afford no better. Again, Dickens on the Five Points, "Where dogs would howl to lie, women, men and boys slink off to sleep, forcing the dislodged rats to move away in quest of better lodgings."[9]

12 In a six-week period in 1832, a cholera epidemic killed 3,512 New Yorkers—most of them blacks and poor Irish immigrants from this district—occasioning desperate city officials to distribute coffins to the poor. Jacob Riis later reported: "[I]n one cholera epidemic that scarcely touched the clean wards, the tenants died at the rate of one hundred and ninety-five to the thousand of population."[10] By 1850, the Five Points claimed the highest population in America, accommodating upwards of 75,000 Germans fleeing persecution,

as well as more than one million Irish escaping the disease and famine from the Irish potato fields. In less than three decades, more to the point, by the time Melville had attained adulthood, a pocket of poverty once concentrated around the Five Points had expanded more than a mile uptown—past Tompkins Square, all the way to 14th Street.

13 The Harpers, publishers of *Moby Dick* and *Pierre*; *or, the Ambiguities* were headquartered at Cliff Street and Wall, four blocks east of Broadway, a quarter mile directly south of the Five Points intersection and close to where Melville's brother practiced law. Melville lived on Fourth Avenue, on the South side of 26th Street, and he would, traversing to the South and East—avoidance of the heart of the area itself requiring a bit of circumambulation—necessarily follow the fringes of the slum. Later in life, when employed as chief inspector of customs, he would go West to Madison Square, follow Fifth Avenue down to 14th Street and then follow the thoroughfare on foot over to Hudson Street, where he would turn to the block below, to the Gansevoort Market and his customs office. In the first quarter-century, this lay just West of the major slums, but by the time of Melville's death, one year after Riis' exposé of economic misery advancing on three-quarters of the city's population, this area too was well in abandon—note Riis' reference to "the bullet-proof shutters, the stacks of hand grenades, and the Gatling guns" of the U.S. Sub-Treasury situated just 4 blocks away from Melville's workplace:

> Where are the tenements of to-day? Say rather: where are they not? In fifty years they have crept up from the Fourth Ward slums and the Five Points the whole length of the island, and have polluted the Annexed District to the Westchester line. Crowding all the lower wards, wherever business leaves a foot of ground unclaimed; strung along both rivers, like ball and chain tied to the foot of every street, and filling up Harlem with their restless, pent-up multitudes, they hold within their clutch the wealth and business of New York, hold them at their mercy in the day of mob-rule and wrath. The bullet-proof shutters, the stacks of hand-grenades, and the Gatling guns of the Sub-Treasury are tacit admissions of the fact and of the quality of the mercy expected. The tenements to-day are New York, harboring three-fourths of its population.[11]

14 Violence erupted routinely on the streets of the lower wards, particularly wherever business left "a foot of ground unclaimed": working-class against upper class, nativists against the foreign born, and riots against the Irish, the English, and the Blacks. In the Fifth Ward, and the adjacent "Bloody" Sixth, rival gangs of Protestants and Catholics vied for control of the streets, resulting in the creation of New York's first police department in 1844. Melville's awareness of these gangs and their street slang may be found in *Redburn* (1849) where Redburn comments on a native New Yorker's use of words like *highbinders* and *rowdies*—the *Dictionary of American English* giving *highbinder* as New York slang for a member of one of the Irish street gangs from the Five Points. There is evidence, meanwhile, that more abrupt negotiations with the environment were visited on Melville. To be precise, on May 10, 1849, 8,000 Irish workers descended upon the Astor Place Opera house incensed by the presence of an aristocratic English actor named William C. Macready in a performance of *Macbeth*. The evening ended with militia firing directly into the crowd, killing 22 and wounding 150 others. This continued two more nights for a total of 30 deaths, and according to John Bryant, Melville joined other members of a political-literary faction called "Young America" in petitioning Macready to continue his tour "but a riot ensued (ironically) on Melville's Astor Place townhouse doorstep."[12] A slight inaccuracy considering Fourth Avenue indeed runs through Astor Place, although Melville's address on 26th and Fourth would place his "townhouse

doorstep" half a mile to the north. The point remains: Melville was scarcely oblivious to the incident.

15 As for Wall Street itself in the 1850s, John Randall describes it as representing "a callously self-interested mercantile society in which any deviance from its norms, if at all insisted upon, leads to punishment by imprisonment and even death."[13] As such, one can well imagine the following, taken from another urban-conscious work of Melville's: *Pierre; or, the Ambiguities*—"First Night of their Arrival in the City" (Book XVI)—as derived from Melville's recurring and immediate experience of the New York quotidian:

> "The pavements, Isabel; this is the town."
> [...] "It feels not so soft as the green sward, Master Pierre."
> "No, Miss Ulver," said Pierre, very bitterly, "the buried hearts of some dead citizens have perhaps come to the surface."
> [...]"And are they so hard-hearted here?" asked Isabel.
> "Ask yonder pavements, Isabel. Milk dropt from the milkman's can in December, freezes not more quickly on those stones, than does snow-white innocence, if in poverty, it chance to fall in these streets."
> [...]"I hear a strange shuffling and clattering," said Delly, with a shudder.
> [...]"Yes," returned Pierre, "it is the shop-shutters being put on; it is the locking, and bolting, and barring of windows and doors; the town's people are going to their rest."
> [...]"They lock and bar out, then, when they rest, do they, Pierre?" said Isabel.
> "Yes, and you were thinking that does not bode well for the welcome I spoke of."
> "Thou read'st all my soul; yes, I was thinking of that. But whither lead these long, narrow, dismal side-glooms we pass every now and then? What are they? They seem terribly still. I see scarce any body in them; —there's another, now. See how haggardly look its criss-cross, far separate lamps.—What are these side-glooms dear Pierre; whither lead they?"
> "They are the thin tributaries, sweet Isabel, to the great Oronoco thoroughfare we are in; and like true tributaries, they come from the far-hidden places; from under dark beetling secrecies of mortar and stone; through the long marsh-grasses of villainy, and by many a transplanted bough-beam, where the wretched have hung." [14]

16 Like *Pierre or the Ambiguities*, "Bartleby" never explicitly names New York, arguably mythifying its function as the Unstated.The "City" in *Pierre* is recognizable with its "great Oronoco thoroughfare" indicating Broadway and the "large, open triangular space, built round with the stateliest public erections" referring to City Hall Park. But the omission of place-names suggests *Pierre's* city more as paradigmaticurban setting, rapacious and corrupt, appropriate to the destruction of Pierre's idealism. In "Bartleby," New York can be identified through verifiable references: *Wall Street, Broadway, Trinity Church* (an Episcopalian Church near the lawyer's office, renowned for its wealthy congregation),*The Custom House*, which stood at Wall and Nassau streets (where Ginger Nut buys the apples, and perhaps the ginger wafers from which he got his nickname, and where Melville ended his days as customs inspector), as well as areas immediately adjacent—*Jersey City, Manhattanville, Astoria*—wealthy communities identifying New York, contrastively, as fulcrum to the swings of the narrator's locale.

2. The Narrator's "fraternal melancholy"

17 The lawyer-narrator in "Bartleby" seems to represent an amiable but certainly uncomprehending upper-class view of the scrivener—newly-arrived to New York and in

need of work—and arguably symbolizes one of the many stone-hearted "dead citizens" Melville, in real life, encountered in the City. The lawyer does indeed attempt making accommodations with the "peculiarities" of his employee, but all within the context of a self-oriented sense of composure and dignity which nonetheless rejects the possibility of comprehending the Other. He is consoled by readings of theologian Jonathan Edwards and scientist Joseph Priestly ("Edwards on the Will" and "Priestly on Necessity"), both having denied the doctrine of free will and encouraging the notion that history was pre-ordained.[15] This tactic conveniently obviates the need to reflect more deeply on Bartleby's condition since, whether the product of free will or destiny, the repercussions of Bartleby's actions, in keeping with these principles, would reside beyond the ken or responsibility of the lawyer, thus remaining the scrivener's own business entirely.

18 With reference to Bartleby's repeated "preferences" (typically: "I would prefer not to,") along with his final statement on his condition in the Tombs: "I know where I am"(72), Liane Norman suggests that what Bartleby is really saying is: "I know your freedom and prosperity and I want nothing to do with them. They did not permit me to choose."[16] This tacit "knowing" which seems to undergird much of Bartleby's impermeable (from the narrator's standpoint) interiority resonates with the legal principles in the process of evolving at the time and otherwise of sufficient social import as to have doubtlessly received widespread publicity. The question remains whether "know" in this sense entails familiarity with freedom and prosperity—which may be accepted or rejected—or whether it refers to certain "assumptions" society entertains with reference to individuals in marginal positions or in positions of distress relative to the mainstream.

19 In association with the "dead wall reveries" in which Bartleby indulges himself, "I know where I am" could easily refer to being "walled-in" or "up against the wall" in terms of choices. In this case, Bartleby has not exercised a free choice against "your freedom and prosperity" as much as simply expressing the awareness that he may never know freedom or prosperity because of the obstacles placed by the society he lives within. And the scrivener's unwillingness to elaborate on justifications for his conduct amount to the equivalent of "Open your eyes." A most telling exchange between narrator and scrivener reveals Bartleby's impatience with as well as the absurdity of such interrogations: "And what is the reason?" queries the narrator upon revelation of Bartleby's preference to stop all work entirely. "Do you not see the reason for yourself?" responds the scrivener (52), leaving the lawyer to founder in suppositions related to Bartleby's health, eyestrain principally, but overall revealing the lawyer "perceptiveness" as crude and facile. Kingsley Widmer, who judges the lawyer's "caritas as the product of 'mere self-interest'," is very much on point in his harsh judgment of the narrator. The story manifests "a generosity which reveals both incomprehension and contempt" and further "shows the obtuseness of such rationality and the brutality of such decency."[17]

20 W. B. Stein argues that, in the extreme case, Bartleby's employer through "inadvertent revelations of his corruption" demonstrates the "hypocrisy of contemporary Christianity."[18] One example occurs at a critical moment in the short story, when the narrator seems to undergo a crisis of conscience: "For the first time in my life a feeling of overpowering stinging melancholy seized me. Before, I had never experienced aught but a not unpleasing sadness." One finds here the striking admission to entertaining "sadness" as its own parodic counterpart in what is blithely referred to as "the blues"—the essence of a reassuring self-pity associated with lyricism, soft ballads, dim lighting and alcohol—certainly "not unpleasing" in the least:

> The bond of a common humanity now drew me irresistibly to gloom. A fraternal melancholy! For both I and Bartleby were sons of Adam. I remembered the bright silks and sparkling faces I had seen that day, in gala trim, swan-like sailing down the Mississippi of Broadway; and I contrasted them with the pallid copyist, and thought to myself, Ah, happiness courts the light, so we deem the world is gay; but misery hides aloof, so we deem that misery there is none (p. 23).

21 Midway through this passage, the narrator emerges from his "gloom" by speaking with an assertive, personal voice: "For both I and Bartleby were sons of Adam. I remembered [...]" This kind of ingenuousness has prompted critics to affirm the lawyer's capacity for "considerable moral growth" but the charitable impulses of Melville's narrator are extremely tenuous; they are consistently qualified and called into question by the narrator's easy return to a safe and detached point of vantage:

> These sad fancyings-chimeras, doubtless, of a sick and silly brain-led on to other and more special thoughts, concerning the eccentricities of Bartleby. Presentiments of strange discoveries hovered round me. The scrivener's pale form appeared to me laid out, among uncaring strangers, in its shivering winding-sheet (23).

22 In other words, in the space of a single stretch of discourse, the narrator has transformed an empathetic "melancholy" to a more easily manageable identification—since we are both "sons of Adam" I too have reason to feel despair—to the outright denial of the original emotion by relegating it to the realm of the infirm. In typical fashion the narrator divests himself of personal responsibility to Bartleby by invoking the mysterious, inexorable world of "sad fancyings," "special thoughts," and "presentiments." The reference to "chimeras [...] of a sick and silly brain" blatantly undercuts not only the sympathetic tendencies just exhibited but also the charitable thrust implicit in the funereal vision of Bartleby's form laid out "among uncaring strangers, in its winding sheet." Bartleby's fate is thus prefigured by the narrator's casting away of negative emotion evinced through their contact—this feeling too, thus shelved in its winding sheet.

3. Dead Letters from the land "of promise and of plenty"

23 The puzzling postscript to the story mentions Bartleby having worked in Washington's Dead Letter Office prior to coming to New York, a possible reason, the narrator suggests, for the scrivener's fatal melancholy. A dead letter is one that cannot be delivered for whatever reason. There exist several possible sources for this reference, the second of which, I suggest, introduces an interesting analysis of the tale as a whole. There was a vogue of Dead Letter Office articles about the time "Bartleby" was written. One possible Melville source, Timothy Quicksand's "Dead-Letters," which appeared in *The New-England Magazine* in 1831, works toward a somewhat different effect from the somber tones encountered in "Bartleby". Referring to the letter contents:

> What love and hatred, advice and entreaties, prayers, deceit and cunning; what malice, pride, avarice and hypocrisy; what charity and friendship, what grief, and pangs, and humiliation, annoyance and trouble; what parental anxiety, and alluring persuasion, what fraud and folly, fears and hopes, ambition and corruption; slander and meanness; soundness and insipidity, speculations and castles in the air; what disappointments, vanity, lies and flattery, arrogance and foppery; what kindness, true religion, and rank zeal and persecution; what villainy and virtue, knowledge

> and nonsense, was concentrated here, within a few bags from all the quarters of the globe--all to be cancelled within a short time! [19]

24 George Monteiro concludes that this is thesource for the ending of "Bartleby", where Bartleby's condition, the narrator makes us understand, may have been linked to job-induced melancholia occasioned by prior employment in Baltimore's dead letter office. Published until 1835, *The New-England Magazine* was the most famous journal to appear in New England prior to *The Atlantic Monthly*. Melville's interest in it may have dated from his Berkshires meeting with Nathaniel Hawthorne just as he was writing *Moby-Dick*. Hawthorne was an early and frequent contributor to its pages, publishing there, for the first time, such stories as "Wakefield," "Young Goodman Brown,"and "The Grey Champion."[20] There exists another candidate, however. A likelier inspiration for the ending of "Bartleby"is a widely disseminated essay, "Dead Letters—By a Resurrectionist," which first appeared in the Albany *Register* for September 23, 1852. As the editor of the *Register* observed, "It is written in a style admirably adapted to the subject, and conveys much information with regard to the interior working of the Dead Letter office that *is* both interesting and new."

> In the building known as the General Post Office, and on the first floor thereof, there sit from morn till night, and day after day, a body of grave, calm men, whose duty it is to deal with these mortuary remains, sadly exemplyfying [sic] the scripture teaching of the nearness of life to death [...] The rooms which these co-laborers with the worm inhabit are tomb-like and dark--echoing to the foot-fall like crypts and like them, finished with groined arches while the air is close and smells of decay [...] Piled in the halls, outside the doors of these melancholy vaults, are great sacks, locked and sealed and labelled "DEAD LETTERS," and ever and anon, appears a grim, sexton-like old negro, who seizing a bag disappears with it into one or other of the tombs. You may enter with me if you will, and treading carefully over the ashes that lie scattered everywhere beneath your feet, watch the processes by which living thoughts and high aspirations, and love's word-tokens, and the burning phrases of ambition, and hope, and joy, and the fitful dreamings of the poet, the cool calculations of the money getter, the prophetic outgivings of the politician--all the thousand varied emotions, sympathies and expressions that go to make up "correspondence" are here converted into lifeless, meaningless trash.[...]

25 From his temporary country home named Arrowhead, just across the state border near Pittsfield, Melville had every chance to read this evocative and informative article at the moment of its appearance, especially since his relatives in and around Albany would have been worriedly scanning the papers for reviews of *Pierre.* Parker points out that Melville items had appeared in the newspaper (including a review of *White-Jacket* and a partial reprinting of the first *Literary World* notice of *Moby-Dick*), so Melville or his family might well have been on the lookout for a review of *Pierre* in September, 1852.[21] In any event, by the time Melville was writing "Bartleby", the piece had already been reprinted in the principal New York City papers before being circulated around the country. HershelParker has tracked down at least four such occurrences, all of which Melville would have had access to prior to "Bartleby", and stresses the fact that Melville's first readers were predisposed to interpret what the narrator calls the "sequel" of "Bartleby" in the light of their own acquaintance with many periodical pieces "exploiting the mournfully suggestive name of the postal department."[22] For our purposes, the following excerpt from the *Register's* article seems by far the most illuminating, considering the New York locale Melville was most familiar with. It is the only extended concrete reference to dead letter destinations in the piece, and it raises the singular tragedy of the Irish immigrant. The passage begins: "The now constant emigration of the Irish people,

especially, affords another reason for the miscarriage of letters addressed by adopted citizens here, to their relatives and friends at home."

> Many letters are returned, which after having passed through perhaps a dozen or twenty offices, and become completely covered untill the memoranda of Postmasters, to "Try Drogheda," "Try Ballymuck," "Try Kinsale," &c., and the Postmaster of the various places "tried" finally get back with the legend, in great letters, "gone to America," inscribed across the face.

26 Referring to those letters returned during the famine "with the one word 'dead,' upon them", the author remarks: "We will only say that they were numbered by thousands." He adds: "Many letters, thus returned, find their owners here, and the little pittance, which thoughtful friends had intended to aid in bringing them out of the land of starvation to that of promise and of plenty, is drawn at the counters of the bankers who issued the draft."

27 Thus, in this analysis, Bartleby comes to represent the unacknowledged human misery of the epoch riding the fringes of the Wall Street legal and financial mentality. Melville's relationships to the legal community notwithstanding—it has been argued that the narrator is modeled after Melville's father-in-law Justice Lemuel Shaw, in real life draconian in his Massachusetts State Supreme Court opinions with reference to fugitive slaves as well as railroad workers—one draws little by way of charitable comparison aside from perhaps an unintentional blindness to the ills perpetuated through his decisions. Ills particularly in evidence in Melville's own milieu due, again perhaps too kindly, to economic factors essential to the growth of the new nation and by extension, as in the case of Shaw, to professionally ethical commitments flowing from the conferral of judgeships in that era. This idea, therefore, departs considerably from Richard Chase's analysis:

> The strained and complex relationship between Bartleby and the lawyer may have certain similarities to the relationship between Melville and his father-in-law, also a lawyer, who helped the Melville family finance itself while Melville went on writing instead of getting a job.[23]

28 Such felicitous and vain mirroring of the personal in Melville's artistry certainly occurs in several chapters of *Pierre*—added rather recklessly and spitefully after a last-minute royalties reduction on the part of his publishers—but in the absence of which, as evidenced in Hershel Parker's interesting if controversial "Kraken Edition" (see footnote 20), the work's unrivalled excellence and beauty emerges. This is not the case in the tight, coherent "Bartleby". Although it could be argued that Bartleby's several gestures of turning away from conversation to staring at a "dead wall" could be taken to correspond to Melville's own chosen seclusion, as a figure in the short story this stance rests within the theme of being "in the world yet not of it"—possibly by choice, as in Melville's case, but not exclusively so—as evidenced by the disenfranchised millions of New Yorkers who, in the heart of fabulously wealthy Gotham, constitute nevertheless marginalia to society. By far the most appealing statement available on this theme comes from the pen of Richard Fogle, who characterizes such direct autobiographical associations as denigrating Melville's work to that of "a puerile irony" and, by extension, "an elaborate trick upon the reader":

> If [...] these themes represent his main intention in the story, then the worse for Melville. It would make him guilty of a puerile irony and an elaborate trick upon the well-meaning reader [...] Bartleby as representative man is certainly more interesting than Bartleby as author, or than Bartleby as Melville.[24]

29 Bartleby becomes Wall Street's "Secret Sharer", a dark stone in the heart of the thriving financial center which New York has become by this era. The Tombs, where Bartleby ends his days, was the principal vehicle for debtors, homeless derelicts such as Bartleby, and murderers alike—notable in the extended reference in the story to the Colt-Adams murder case. "Bartleby", hence, in this scheme, could be taken as Melville's attempt to penetrate the outward respectability of the financial district's façade.

30 He issues from this wealth as dross spewed as byproduct from a gigantic factory works. He is there, in short, since wealth generates employment, however meager or demeaning —as it did for the starving Irish, for all the good it did them in the Five Points. In closing, Bartleby is New York, the meanness of life within which, particularly for Pierre's "snow-white innocence, *if in poverty*" goes without saying for Melville's contemporaries—as, some may argue, remains the case in our time.

NOTES

1. "Bartleby" first appeared in two parts in November and December 1853, in *Putnam's Monthly Magazine*. It was later included in a collection of short stories by Melville entitled *The Piazza Tales* (1856). All references in this article are to the Simon & Schuster Edition, New York, 1997.

2. "Bartleby". 47, 61

3. The "Walls" appear on the third page of the original edition (21- 22 in Simon and Schuster's) in the context of the "great height of the surrounding buildings", and briefly on 30 and 46 in describing Bartleby's habit of staring at the blank wall opposite his window.

4. Ronald Wesley Hoag, "The Corpse in the Office: Mortality, Mutability and Salvation in *Bartleby, the Scrivener*", *ESQ: A Journal of the American Renaissance* 38 (1992) Washington State University: 141.

5. "...[Melville's] prose and poetry rival Scripture, ingesting it into his own innovative, post-Scriptural voice that uses biblical sublimity against itself." Jenny Franchot, "Melville's Traveling God" in *The Cambridge Companion to Herman Melville*, Robert S. Levine, ed., London: Cambridge UP, 1998. 177

6. Hoag. 142

7. "Melville left a happy and successful career behind him, and plunged into the cold black depths of the spirit, the depths of the sunless ocean, the blackness of interstellar space, and though he proved that life could not be lived under those conditions, he brought back into the petty triumphs of the age the one element that it completely lacked: the tragic sense of life." Lewis Mumford, *Herman Melville: A Study of His Life and Vision*; New York, Harcourt, Brace and World, 1929. xvi

8. Charles Dickens, *American Notes and Pictures from Italy*, London: Chapman and Hall, 1874. 101. It was not until 1867 that owners of swine were prohibited by ordinance from letting them run at large in the built-up portions of the city.

9. Dickens. 103

10. Jacob A. Riis, *A Ten Years' War: An Account of the Battle with the Slum in New York,* New York: Books for Libraries Press, 1969, originally published by Charles Scribner and Sons, New York, 1890. 4.

11. Ibid. 15

12. John Bryant, "Moby-Dick as Revolution" in *The Cambridge Companion to Herman Melville*, Robert S. Levine, ed., Cambridge, UK: Cambridge UP, 1998. 81

13. John H.Randall III, "Bartleby *vs.* Wall Street: New York in the 1850s." *Bulletin of the New York Public Library*, 78 (1975), 144.

14. Herman Melville, *Pierre; or, the Ambiguities: the Kraken Edition*, New York, Harper Collins, 1995 (orig. Pub. Harpers, 1852). 328-9. Hershel Parker, *Kraken* editor, has been criticized (particularly by Richard Poirier, "The Monster in the Milk Bowl", *London Review of Books*, October 3, 1996. 19-22) for deleting chapters of *Pierre* which appeared after Melville's dispute with Harper's. In fact, these very chapters constitute such a drastic departure from the tone and coherence of the main piece as to render the basis for such criticism questionable to say the least. Take for example the differences between Henry James' 1881 edition of *Portrait of a Lady* and the 1908 New York edition (in the Norton Critical Edition of *Portrait*, there are 80 pages of "substantial", as opposed to "accidental", changes—accompanied by the editor's observation that James "literally rewrote" the novel during the 2 years preceding the New York publication in 1908—effectively changing the novel to include a more mature theory of art as well as recent developments in the field of psychology). It has been widely established that Melville's financial instabilities figured significantly in his various switches in theme as well as in his decision to fairly abandon this career for the remaining 4 decades of his life.

15. Note the use of "preference" in Edwards': "in every voliton there is a preference, or a prevailing inclination of the soul" Jonathan Edwards, *Freedom of the Will,* ed. Paul Ramsey, New Haven: Yale U P, 1957. 140

16. Liane Norman "Bartleby and the Reader," *New England Quarterly* 44 [1971]: 38

17. Kingsley Widmer, "Negative Affirmation: Melville's 'Bartleby,'" *Modern Fiction Studies, 8 (1962),* 283.

18. W. B. Stein, "Bartleby: the Christian Conscience," *Melville Annual 1965*. 105.

19. Timothy Quicksand, "Dead-Letters," *The New-England Magazine*, 1 (1831), 505-506

20. George Monteiro, "Melville, 'Timothy Quicksand,' and the Dead-Letter Office," *Studies in Short Fiction,* 9 (Spring 1972), pp. 198-201.

21. Parker, Hershel. "Dead Letters and Melville's Bartleby,"*Resources for American Literary Study* 4: 90-99. 1974 Pennsylvania State University The entire article is with an introduction by Hershel Parker.

22. Hershel Parker "The "Sequel" in "Bartleby"* M. Thomas Inge from *Bartleby the Inscrutable* (Hamden, CT: Archon Books, 1979), pp. 159-65

23. Richard Chase, *Herman Melville: Selected Tales and Poems*, New York: Macmillan, 1950. 147.

24. Richard Harter Fogle, *Melville's Shorter Tales*, Norman: U of Oklahoma P, 1960.23

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